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ABSTRACT

The Silas Bronson Library in Waterbury, Connecticut received a state grant in 1976 to provide increased accessibility to their services through a books-by-mail program. In 1975, 9,750 catalogs listing the books-by-mail collection were mailed to local households. Newspaper publicity requested that households that received the catalogs share them with neighbors. The catalogs contained postage-paid request cards. Books from a special paperback collection were mailed to patrons in postage-paid, returnable book bags. Adult materials proved the most popular. The bulk of the books went to homebound persons. The personnel and supplies budget for the first year's program was $31,859.95. The major recurring expense was printing the catalogs. (KB)

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Silas Bronson Library

Books-By-Mail Using a Mail Order Book Catalog

A Project Report

In November 1974 a grant was received from the Connecticut State Library to help finance an additional means of providing patron accessibility to the Silas Bronson Library resources, in this instance through a mail order book catalog. Books-By-Mail projects have been functioning for quite some time and emphasis has been primarily twofold: In the rural areas the service has been intended for people who live long distances from established permanent libraries or bookmobile stops; in the urban areas the service has been intended for the disadvantaged in the innercity and for the physically handicapped. The Waterbury project has a broader application. There are no restrictions of any kind on who may use the service, any Waterbury resident is eligible. The project offers an additional choice to the community how books may be borrowed from the public library. It has also introduced library services to people who were never aware of them before.

Serving the public through the mails is a very convenient, popular way of doing business. The national book clubs have been tremendously successful using this method, and it is a pretty good rule of thumb that what pays off in the business sector can very often, with suitable modifications, pay off for the public library. I suspect that the main reason Books-By-Mail service has not been used more extensively by public libraries is because there is a deep apprehension that the public would be weaned away from visiting library buildings and bookmobiles, thereby decreasing the need for these facilities. I have no statistics to support or contradict that premise, but I do know that the regular circulation of the Silas Bronson Library has increased 22% during the past year and that many Books-By-Mail users who are not homebound continue to use the central library and its branches as well.

There are book lovers who would fight through a 25 foot wall of nuclear conflagration to get to a book, and then there are people who wouldn't touch a book even if it were laid on their laps with $100 bill sticking out of the pages. Somewhere in between these extremes are people who find it difficult to travel to the Library because of inadequate transportation or parking facilities; are handicapped by sickness, old age or physical disability; are employed at home, office, factory or shop during the hours the Library is open; are not strongly motivated to read; would prefer the convenience of the mailbox outside their front door to the inconvenience of any kind of travel. Books-By-Mail is designed to serve all these people with a free library book service as close as the nearest mailbox.

A mail order book catalog consisting of 70 pages was printed for the Silas Bronson Library by a local commercial printer. The contents of the catalog were basically the same as the latest edition of the catalog being used by the county systems in New York State. The table of contents:

Animals
Antiques
Arts
Cookery

IR004058

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Sewing
Sports
Supernatural
Vacation Fun
Wars, Past and Present
Western
Wheels.
Fiction for Teens
Special Interest for Teens
Picture books
Easy Readers
Children's Stories
Things to Know, People to Meet

Each title listed in the catalog was assigned a number--a letter followed by a number in sequence. The letters used were A, adult fiction; N, adult non-fiction; T, young adult; NY, young adult non-fiction; P, juvenile picture books; E, juvenile easy readers; C, children's fiction; NJ, children's non-fiction. Books in the separate Books-By-Mail collection are shelved by this number. It is easier to fill requests by this special number arrangement than by an author arrangement or a Dewey classification arrangement.

Included in the catalog is a folded double card with a perforated center line which can be torn apart easily. Each part is a postage paid card that can be returned to the Library by the patron which he fills in with his name, address, telephone number, date and three author and titles with their catalog control numbers. The verso of the front cover of the catalog explains in detail how the patron orders and receives books through the mail.

In January 1975, 9,750 mail order book catalogs were mailed out to Waterbury households. At the request of the Post Office the mailings were staggered over four weekends. This piecemeal approach was better not only for the Post Office but also for the Library because it meant the Books-By-Mail clerks weren't deluged by an enormous return mail all at one time. The Post Office assisted in selecting the streets where the catalogs were to be mailed so that random mailing would thinly blanket the city rather than concentrate

only a few areas. Almost every residential street in the city was included. Publicity in the newspapers requested that households receiving the catalog share it with their neighbors in 32,000 residual households in the city.

The number of request cards returned during the period January 1975 through December 1975 is 8,918. In almost every instance the card lists three titles so the number of total requests for the year is 26,754.

Books are mailed to the patron in a mailing bag that is reusable. Tape to reseal the mailing bag, a mailing label and return postage are enclosed in the mailing bag with the books as well as a return request card. This card does not have free postage printed on it. It is meant to be included with the books when they are mailed back to the Library in the reusable bag. There is a limit of three books mailed a patron each time.

Books are loaned for four weeks. A date due slip is put in the book pocket. Each book has a book card. On this card the library assistant writes the name and address to whom the books are being sent and stamps the due date. The book cards are filed by due date and then by catalog control number for resliping when the books are returned.

If a title is not available a substitution as nearly like the original request as possible is made. No reserve file is maintained. A borrower is urged to resubmit a request for an unavailable title.

The borrower need not be registered in the Library to obtain books through Books-By-Mail. Anyone with a Waterbury address will be served. No fines are charged, though some patrons will enclose money with their books if they are overdue. Because the number of overdue books is so low, (.007%), retrieval procedures are limited to a first notice postcard. A patron, however, is billed the cost of replacing books lost or mutilated.

A special collection of paperback books was purchased for this project. All the titles in the catalog that were still in print were obtained, though there was a high incidence (26%) of titles not available. Some titles not in the catalog were purchased as substitutes for the out-of-print titles. Five copies of each title was ordered, though some books have been so popular additional copies have had to be obtained. The collection has 8,000 books with 1200 different titles.

The processing of the books includes pasting in book pockets; assigning catalog control numbers; typing author cards, title cards and book cards; affixing labels; reinforcing some of the spines.

The postage stamps that are affixed to the mailing bags are precanceled. The postage stamps that accompany the books and are used to mail the books back to the Library are not precanceled. The outgoing packages are sorted into Post Office canvas bags according to zip code numbers. The canvas bags are picked up by the postman each morning when he drops off the daily mail, including return Books-By-Mail books.

The Post Office personnel have been outstanding in their cooperation and helpfulness in setting up and maintaining this service, even providing a special rack in the Library for the canvas bags. The Books-By-Mail project has been discussed at regional postal service meetings by the local Post Office administrators as a good example of how the Post Office can work with a community agency.

Borrowers may telephone in their requests for materials from the catalog. The number of telephone inquiries averages 26 a week.

The only supplement to the catalog has been a mimeographed list of large print books owned by the Library which is mailed out to patrons on request.

The complete circulation figures of books for the period January 1975 through December 1975 showing categories of books and zip code areas is attached at the end of this report.

With 83% of the circulation it is obvious that adult materials are the most popular. Few children and teenagers send in requests. Childrens books are ordered mainly by parents and teenagers prefer visiting the Library. The bulk of the books go to the homebound--people who are handicapped by old age, physical disability or sickness. People who can get to the Library without too much difficulty seem to prefer doing so. I think this might be because visiting a library has some of the fun and interest of going to a museum or visiting any public institution where there are other people to talk to and socialize with. Silas Bronson Library is a handsome building and a lot of time and effort goes into providing exhibits, displays and programs to attract the public. Going to the Library can be a very plesaant experience.

However, I do not believe this invalidates the premise that Books-By-Mail service should be extended to all the community as still another way of providing materials to the reading public. Indeed, I would like to see the service extended: a catalog going to every household in the city annually; supplements of all types being distributed regularly, in fact <u>all</u> the printed circulating materials in the Library being made available by mail.

Special supplies used: "Books-By-Mail" rubber stamps for stamping books and cards, postal scales, mailing labels--red print for outgoing packages blue print for return, Dura Bags mailing bags, self-adhesive tape for out-going packages and gummed tape for packages being returned. Jiffy bags are not used because when they begin to tear apart the insides are too messy. The best bags are those with the plastic bubbles liner but they are too expensive.

Space used: An area that accommodates a clerk's desk, three work tables and 336 feet of running shelf space for the book collection.

Staff needed: It was thought that one full time clerical assistant could handle the entire project single-handedly after the initial rush. This has not proved to be so. For a few months 2½ clerks and a part-time page were required to keep the project current. Luckily the Library has been able to obtain CETA

employees and retired people from a federally funded senior aid program to assist. At present one full time clerk and a half time senior aid handle all the work.

It required about four months to acquire and process the paperback books and to prepare the catalog for the commercial printer. Paid assistance using handicapped personnel was obtained from the Easter Seal Society to write street addresses on the printed catalogs as was required by the Post Office.

Budget

Printed Catalogs	$7,653.95	
Mailing Bags	539.77	
Postage	3,091.20	
Books	9,375.14	
Supplies	1,039.92	
Total	$21,699.98	
Personnel:		
Library Clerk, full time	$5,200	
Library Page	320	
Assistant - CETA	4,000	(estimated)
Assistant - Senior Aide	640	(estimated)
Total	$10,160	
Grand Total	$31,859.98	

The most expensive recurring cost of this project is the printed catalog. Ideally a new edition should be distributed annually. Obviously the more catalogs printed, the lower the cost. If more public libraries in Connecticut would be willing to provide this service in their communities, a state-wide catalog could be printed at a substantial financial savings, as is currently being done in New York State. It is even conceivable for Connecticut and

New York librarians to develop a joint Books-By-Mail project through their state libraries or their state library association.

Unfortunately because postage rates are going up it will not be possible for the Silas Bronson Library to continue paying the return postage for books. Borrowers will soon have to assume that cost.

Books-By-Mail service is a successful means of providing free reading materials to the community. Circulation statistics show that the service can be as popular as a community reading center or a bookmobile if the bookmobile stops are not scheduled exclusively at schools. Books-By-Mail does not require a driver nor is it dependent on a vehicle that requires continual maintenance and may be laid up for repairs thereby interrupting all service. The strongest negative factor in Books-By-Mail service is that it is so impersonal--the reader never gets to talk to a librarian about books and the weather, the librarian never has the opportunity to advise a reader about other titles that would be of interest. And of course there is no reference service. In spite of these shortcomings Books-By-Mail service does get out into the community, directly into peoples' homes. The Silas Bronson Library plans to continue offering the service to residents of Waterbury.

Stanford Warshasky
Director

SILAS BRONSON LIBRARY

BOOKS-BY-MAIL

Period Reported January 1975 through December 1975

Postcards Received 8918

CIRCULATION

ZIP	Adult Fiction (A)	Adult Nonfiction (N)	Total Adult	Young Adult Fiction (T)	Young Adult Nonfiction (NY)	Total Young Adult	Picture Books (P)	Easy Readers (E)	Juvenile Fiction (C)	Juvenile Nonfiction (NJ)	Total Juvenile	Grand Total
06702	311	206	517	11	38	49	1	3	5	11	20	586
06704	1,164	1,200	2,364	137	185	322	97	84	161	104	446	3,132
06705	3,258	2,252	5,510	277	216	493	191	109	191	143	634	6,637
06706	1,817	1,100	2,917	137	110	247	84	68	81	91	318	3,488
06708	3,306	2,352	5,658	243	140	383	133	95	192	154	574	6,616
06710	1,014	559	1,573	95	51	146	31	11	26	22	90	1,808
06714	453	397	850	23	28	51	6	16	29	11	59	963
GRAND TOTAL	11,323	8,066	19,389	923	768	1,691	543	386	685	536	2,150	23,230